

RUSSIAN-POLISH RELATIONS

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THE Polish-Russian problem is only a part of the general problem of European post-war reconstruction, and I do not need to emphasize the importance of Polish-Russian relations as an element of this.

Before presenting my Polish view of these relations, I should like to draw the attention of the reader to a peculiar paradox. The present war began in Poland and, if not *for* Poland, at least *because of* Poland. We know now what a bloody affair the Polish campaign was. We know now what the Polish pilots did in the Battle of Britain. We know that the Polish army and the Polish navy are fighting on every front, and that inside Poland a powerful underground movement has been organized, connected with the Polish Government-in-Exile. We know that from the beginning there have been no Polish Quislings, no armistice and no collaboration, and that from the beginning the Polish nation has played only one game—that of unrelenting struggle against Germany. We know that millions of Polish civilians have been killed and that, as Mr. H. Bevin and others have many times reminded us, Poland is now suffering most, of all the nations of Europe. And yet, for some time now, this heroic and martyred nation has become an object of accusation and persecution on the part of certain misinformed sections of the press and public opinion, and she is even facing a dismemberment—which will be her recompense for all her merits and services. What are her crimes? And what are the accusations?

1. Accusation and Crime Number One: Poland's attitude towards the problem of her eastern borderlands. According to her accusers, she has taken an unrealistic, uncompromising, and even imperialistic attitude on this subject. What are the facts?

(a) *From an historical point of view:* The Polish eastern borderlands belonged, on the basis of a free federation, to the Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian Commonwealth, from the end of the fourteenth century to 1795. These lands were under Russian rule only during the time of the Partitions, that is for about 125 years. Some of them never belonged to Russia, as, for example, Eastern Galicia with Lwow.

(b) *From the point of view of international law:* From 1921 to 1939 these lands were an integral part of the Polish state on the basis of the Treaty of Riga. This treaty was recognized by all Powers, and in Article III we may read the following statement: "Russia and the Ukraine abandon all rights and claims to the west of the frontier." I should like to emphasize here one very important detail: Russia has never recognized Rumania's title to Bessarabia as she recognized in the Treaty of Riga Poland's claims to her eastern borderlands. As one distinguished English political writer put it in June of last year: "For a modification of the Russian-Polish frontier there is none." On March 15, 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors, representing the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan and the United States, recognized the frontiers of the Treaty of Riga.

On July 25, 1932, Poland and Russia signed a pact of non-aggression in which each agreed to respect the inviolability of the territory and political independence of the other, and not to be a party to any agreement hostile to the other. On July 3, 1933, an agreement was signed at London by the representatives of Russia, Poland, Rumania, Estonia, Latvia, Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan in the same sense and including a definition of the term "aggressor". On February 14, 1934, Mr. Litvinov, speaking at a reception at the Polish Foreign Office, emphasized in warmest terms the excellent relations that existed between Russia and Poland and the profound process of rapprochement. On May 5, 1934, the Polish-Russian pact of non-aggression of 1932 was renewed until December 1, 1945. On May 13, 1939, Mr. Potemkin, a Soviet diplomat who happened to be in Warsaw at that time, assured the Polish Foreign Minister that Russia would adopt *une attitude bienveillante* towards Poland in the event of an armed conflict between Poland and Germany. On the 31st of the same month, Mr. Molotov declared that Russia stood for the cause of peace, and that a certain general improvement was noticeable in the relations between Russia and Poland. And now, what happened after all this? On August 23, 1939, a non-aggression pact was concluded between Russia and Germany. On the first of September, Germany attacked Poland. On September 17, Russia announced that the Polish state had ceased to exist, and invaded Poland.

Continuing our legal diagnosis, we come to the agreement of July 30, 1941, signed by Mr. Maiski, Russian ambassador in London and the Polish Prime Minister, General Sikorski, in which we read: "The Government of the Union of Soviet

Socialist Republics recognizes the Soviet-German treaties of 1939 as to territorial changes in Poland as having lost their validity." The restitution of Polish legal rights was supported by Great Britain and the United States, because on the same day the British Government declared in a note to Poland that Britain did not recognize any territorial changes carried out in Poland since August, 1939. On July 31, Mr. Sumner Welles made a similar declaration on behalf of the United States. And need I recall the recent declaration of Mr. Hull, in which he so strongly upheld the principles of the *Atlantic Charter*? It is true that some supporters of Stalin's foreign policy (Mr. Kerensky, for example) argue that the Russian invasion of Poland took place before Russia's adherence to the *Atlantic Charter*, which therefore may be held not to apply in this instance. I think, however, that we are justified in dismissing such casuistry. In the treaty of alliance between Great Britain and Russia which was signed on May 26, 1942, both signatory powers declared: "Article V: They will act in accordance with the two principles of not seeking territorial aggrandizement for themselves and of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states." By that treaty Russia reaffirmed her renunciation of her claim to Eastern Poland. On the other hand, England, on the basis of the Anglo-Polish Agreement of Mutual Assistance, pledged herself to support Poland (Article 3) not only against armed aggression but against any attempt "by a European Power to undermine Polish independence" by "processes of economic penetration or in any other way." Enough for the legal situation—I think it is now sufficiently clear.

(c) *From the ethnographical point of view:* These Polish eastern borderlands have a mixed population. (And we should remember that mixed populations are the rule rather than the exception in Central and Eastern Europe.) This population is mainly Polish, Ukrainian, White Russian, Jewish, with some other nationalities also represented. It is a meeting-place of many nationalities, and the round figures are the following: Poles—five million; Ukrainians and Ruthenians—four and a half; White Ruthenians—one million, one hundred thousand; Jews—one million, one hundred thousand; Russians—one hundred and fifty thousand; Germans—eighty-nine thousand; Lithuanians—eighty-four thousand; Czechs—thirty-five thousand; some Armenians, Karaites, and Tartars. Neither Ukrainians nor White Ruthenians had any desire to pass under Soviet rule. There was a powerful Ukrainian group, the UNDO—

the Ukrainian National Democratic Union—which indeed desired separation from Poland, but not union with Russia. Their hopes were based on war between Germany and Russia, and on the subsequent dismemberment of Poland and Russia. But why must the ethnographic principle be applied to Poland alone? How about the Soviet Union? Is she a homogeneous state?

The frequent references to the so-called Curzon Line made in this connection are hardly justifiable:

“The Treaty of Versailles did not fix the Polish-Russian frontier; it did, however, in Article 87, empower the Principal Allied Powers to fix at a later date these frontiers of Poland about which the treaty contained no provisions. The so-called Curzon Line (it was called that only later, since Lord Curzon was not in fact its author) was merely a temporary delimitation of the territories which the Supreme Council of the Allies on December 8, 1919, recognized as indisputably Polish. It was, moreover, clearly stated in the text that this delimitation did not in the least prejudice any Polish claims to the territories east of this line. It should be added that this line, drawn on December 8, 1919, concerned only territories formerly included in Russian Poland, while it did not at all affect Eastern Galicia, which before 1914 belonged to Austria-Hungary. The Soviet Government never considered the Curzon Line even as a basis for discussion in the drawing of a frontier between Poland and Russia; all the frontiers proposed by Soviet Russia were far to the east of the Curzon Line. . . . When the Soviet Army invaded Poland in 1920, thrusting deep into her territories, and Lord Curzon made his mediation proposals, in which he recalled the decision of the Supreme Allied Council of December 8, 1919, the Soviet Government stated that it was prepared to grant more favourable frontiers to Poland than those suggested by the Curzon Line.” (Namely, the so-called circular signed by Lenin, Trotsky, and Chicherin, stated *inter alia*: ‘The real frontiers which Soviet Russia will establish with the representatives of the Polish people will be to the east of the frontier marked out by the imperialists in London and Paris’—quoted from *The Times*, July 22, 1920)*

(d) *From the cultural point of view*: As these territories belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian Commonwealth for several centuries on the basis of a free union and not conquest, culturally they adopted the Polish civilization. In such cities as Wilno and Lwow, and in many others, every church, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, every synagogue, every mosque, every museum, not to mention our two famous Polish universities, founded by the famous Polish kings Stefan Batory and Jan

* Dr. J. Weyers, *Poland and Russia*, London, 1943, pp. 15-16.

Kazimierz, in Wilno (1579) and Lwow (1661), every building and every tree were put there by Polish hands. These two cities at an early date became great Polish cultural centres, and for centuries they nourished that part of the European East with the spiritual food of Western European civilization. From these eastern borderlands have come the majority of the great Poles of history—the Jagiellonian dynasty, Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Kosciuszko, Pulaski, Paderewski, Pilsudski, to name only a few. These territories have coexisted with Poland, as I have said, during several centuries, and only a part of them remained under Russian rule during the Partitions. In spite of a cruel policy of Russification, they were never successfully incorporated into the Russian Empire. All our insurrections, as a matter of fact, took place for these territories. As a Pole who has spent almost thirty years of his life in Russia, I can certify that the type of cultural life established in this land by century-old tradition is much nearer to that of Central Poland than to, say, that of Tula, Ryazan, or Kuibyshev.

(e) *From the economic point of view:* These lands are poor, with the exception of Eastern Galicia, which has oil fields and some raw materials of use in chemical industries. Poland is not a country rich in raw materials. She has only two sources: Silesia and Eastern Galicia. This poverty created an acute social problem in connection with the proletarianization of the peasant. If Poland should lose one of her two sources of raw materials, the situation would become even more dangerous, dangerous not only for Poland but also for that part of Central and Eastern Europe. To Russia, on the other hand, Eastern Galicia can have no real economic importance. In comparison with her rich oil fields, the Galician fields, which are extremely difficult and expensive to exploit, are as nothing.

II. Accusation Number Two: The alleged hostility of the Polish Government towards Russia and the criticism of this Government as non-representative and non-democratic, such as the Russians cannot trust and the Allies should not support. Again, what are the facts?

It is worth noting that these accusations arose at the time of the Katyn episode and the break of diplomatic relations between Russia and Poland. This is a painful and a long story. Let us begin with the Sikorski-Stalin agreement. As the son of a man whose entire life was devoted to the reconciliation of Russia and

Poland, and as a scholar who has devoted his life and some hundred publications to the spreading of the knowledge of Russian culture in Poland, and admiration for this culture, I may say that I was deeply satisfied by Sikorski's initiative in reestablishing normal relations with Russia immediately after Hitler's attack on her.

I feel justified in advancing the opinion that Poland's most important problem is still, as it has been for centuries, that of Russian-Polish relations, but it is not only Poland's, it is also Russia's most important problem. In the 19th and 20th centuries there has been no great Russian writer, poet, publicist philosopher or historian, who was not preoccupied with this problem. And the same may be said of the writers of Poland. These two nations, these two states cannot exist normally without a peaceful and just solution of their common historical problems. That is why I was deeply satisfied by Sikorski's initiative. I considered it as proof of great political realism, as well as a proof of great civic courage.

I do not need to explain why it was realistic. It was wise, because Sikorski preserved harmony among the United Nations and facilitated the approach to Russia, giving proof that Poland is able to sacrifice much for the common cause. It was courageous, because it was not easy to shake hands with Stalin after what he had done to Poland in 1939 when he was collaborating with Hitler, and what he had done in Poland in 1940 and 41: deportation of one and a half million Polish citizens to Siberia, destruction of Polish lives and civilization, joint proclamation with Germany announcing the annihilation of the Polish state, conscription in the Red Army of Polish citizens residing on Polish territory occupied by the U.S.S.R., executions, arrests, religious persecutions, elections held in these territories, forced plebiscites, unspeakable ill-treatment of Polish prisoners of war.

It was very natural to believe, after the German attack on Russia, that the Soviet-German Treaties of 1939, which divided Poland between Germany and Russia, had lost their validity. It was quite justifiable to believe, after the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet Agreement (July 30th, 1941) and the British and American declarations, that these treaties had lapsed. General Sikorski shortly after went to Russia to meet Stalin, in a mood of great enthusiasm, caused by the successful outcome of his efforts. He became a sort of advocate of Russian military proposals and suggestions in connection with the necessity of establishing the so-called "second front". Everyone, I hope, remembers the

speeches and interviews in which he expressed his admiration for the resistance of the Russian army, and preached a full cooperation with Russia. Those who have never read the pathetic letters of Polish citizens, deported to Siberia, separated from their families, all of them in abject poverty, who saw in this settlement the first hope of life and liberty; those who have not seen thousands of Poles, ragged and barefoot, who walked from the Arctic zone to Kuibyshev in order to enroll immediately in the fighting units, cannot realize the tragic paradox of this enthusiasm.

The task of General Sikorski was enormous. He had to organize a Polish Relief for the million and a half deported citizens of Poland, to find and liberate all prisoners of war, to rebuild the Polish army in Russia, and lastly to find several thousands of officers scattered in groups all over Russia. Before long, his task in Russia became very difficult. The Soviet Government raised all sorts of obstacles to the liberation of the deported Polish citizens. This went on parallel to the continually recurrent problem of the Russian-Polish frontier, in spite of the stipulations of the Russian-Polish Treaty, which *de iure* restored the Polish frontier of 1939. In this manner the Russian Government advanced the conception that all the deported Polish citizens must now be considered Russian. Long months were spent in futile and painful discussions in regard to this matter.

Very soon articles, photographs, books, almanacs, official and popular publications appeared, in which Polish cities such as Wilno and Lwow were mentioned as essentially Russian. The most drastic sabotage surrounded the organization of Polish military units, and the Polish Government could never obtain any satisfactory answer with regard to the fate of about ten thousand officers whose whereabouts were unknown. The greatest difficulties were experienced in tracing the libraries and collections evacuated from Poland. Finally, the Soviet Government began a diplomatic campaign two years ago, in order to obtain from England and the United States the recognition of its annexations in Poland. Then a press offensive was started, in which Poland was represented as a trouble-maker who raised territorial questions. As a matter of fact, was it Russia or Poland who raised these questions? Finally, we were informed about the execution of Alter and Erlich. It would be painful to review all the calumnies and insinuations which have been directed against Poland and her Government since that time.

If Stalin had had a real desire to collaborate with the United Nations in order to establish in Europe and throughout the world a democratically conceived organization of collective security, he would have helped Sikorski in his difficult tasks in the field of Russian-Polish relations and in his projects for a Central European Federation. He has had many opportunities to do so. Instead, he made Russian-Polish collaboration impossible. Instead of giving Sikorski some concrete results of the Soviet-Polish agreement, he turned it into the complete bankruptcy of Sikorski's Russian policy, and the agreement turned out to be a mere screen used to conceal a terrible reality. Instead of supporting the prestige of Sikorski as a Polish statesman who had successfully prepared the way for lasting Russian-Polish collaboration, he tried to undermine it everywhere, and first of all among the Poles. He went even further. He threatened the Sikorski Government with the possible creation of a Polish puppet Government in Moscow; with what would be the first Quisling Government among the United Nations!

While these policies were being pursued, Sikorski still remained patient and silent. He refrained from informing foreign public opinion of the unhappy failure of Russian-Polish cooperation. But Polish opinion was aware of it, and the Poles were in despair. They felt indignation. Their sacrifices turned out to have been made in vain, and their hopes were vanishing. Poles in Siberia were still dying. And what could the Poles in Poland think and feel?

At such a point came the tragic Katyn episode. The Polish Government asked for an investigation by the International Red Cross, at the same time giving eloquent reminder to Germany that the atrocities of German occupation had not been and would not be forgotten. The Polish Government simply tried to put an end to the question of what had happened to the Polish officers who had disappeared in Russia, about whom no information could be obtained from the Russian Government. I wonder how Canadian public opinion would have reacted if a large number of imprisoned Canadian officers had disappeared without trace.

The reaction of the Soviet Government is well known. To the quiet, correct Polish request an answer was given in most brutal style, and the break of relations, so systematically prepared by the Soviet Government, took place. The Polish Government was accused of not representing anybody, and even of being in collusion with the Axis. It is to the eternal credit of

Polish diplomacy that the Polish Ambassador in Moscow preserved the honor of the United Nations by refusing to accept a note couched in such terms.

The Polish Government-in-Exile is a legal one. Its organization conforms to the Polish Constitution, and this Government was established in an agreement with the last President of the Polish Republic. Its second trait is that it represents all Polish political parties existing in present times in modern Poland. Its third trait is that it is composed of men who, during the last 15 years, were in opposition to the so-called Colonels' Regime in Poland. Its fourth trait is that the underground movement in Poland is coordinated with the delegate of the Polish Government. In one month, there were destroyed in Poland 470 railway cars, 116 locomotives; 17 trains were derailed, 5 key bridges were destroyed, 430 German officials and policemen were killed. One pitched battle was fought with a Nazi force of 2000 men armed with tanks, planes, flame-throwers and artillery. Liberation of Polish prisoners was effected, and 18 German military transport trains were blown up.

The Polish Government in London has complete authority over the Polish resistance to the Nazis in Occupied Poland; each announcement or appeal of the Government is transmitted by the underground press. Recent events have clearly shown that this authority is fully recognized by the nation. The underground press is represented by 110 newspapers, regularly published in Poland at the present moment. 62 of them without any reservation declare themselves for the Polish Government of General Sikorski, and now of Mikolajczyk, 37 give it full support till the end of the war, 12 are in opposition to the Sikorski Government. Concerted manifestations, sabotage, and other activities are organized and correlated by the Director of Resistance, a nominee of the Polish Government. But it is senseless to spend time refuting statements so incredible that they could be intended only for interior propaganda in a country with a rigidly controlled public opinion.

Coming back for a while to the Polish Government-in-Exile, I should like to emphasize another point—the fact that this Government since the death of General Sikorski has been continuing his general policy, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Mikolajczyk, had made several declarations in which he has announced Poland's readiness to resume relations with Russia. But he has rightly emphasized that the initiative belongs to the party that broke them.

Finally, I should like to present here another proof of the essentially constructive and pacific thinking of the Polish Government. I have in mind Sikorski's initiative in working for a federation of Central European nations, which was to create a state of one hundred million people as a powerful factor for peace in Europe. Here again, Stalin torpedoed the work of the Polish Government, considering this project as an attempt to create a new *cordon sanitaire* around Russia. In the first place, Sikorski, from the very beginning, insisted that the chief condition necessary for the realization of this federated state in its proper rôle must be a peaceful collaboration with Russia. This collaboration would assure to Russia a much better guarantee of security on her western borders than any changes in geographical frontiers could possibly give. If Russia has no intention of attacking these countries, why should she object? Could the federation be used against Russia? By whom? By a defeated and disarmed Germany? By a Germany deeply hated by all those countries suffering under the German yoke? Poland never had any aggressive intentions against Russia. From 1933 to 1939, Hitler made several proposals to Poland for a joint invasion of Russia. In spite of very advantageous territorial compensations in Western Russia which Hitler promised to Poland, she never accepted his offers. Would she now accept them in a post-war world? Who else remains as a possible instigator of such an aggression? England, who has a treaty of alliance with Russia? The United States? Defeated France? Ruined Italy?

And now I come to the conclusion. What does Poland want? To be restored as an independent state, with her own territory and resources that would not cripple her natural progress. She wants to live on good-neighbor terms with Russia, but on condition of complete internal independence from Russia. Poland doesn't want to be in the "sphere of influence" of Russia, a Russian protectorate. Neither the domestic nor the foreign policy of Poland should be dictated from Moscow. Would it be acceptable for a nation with Poland's war record to face and accept the prospect of appearing as a dismembered nation after the victory of the United Nations, in which she did her full share? Would it be acceptable for her allies?

Here is the moral aspect of the problem. The Russian annexations of 1939 no longer exist, even on paper, because the treaties that announced them have been declared invalid by the Russians themselves. These lands were under Russian rule while Russia was collaborating with Germany. They were given

to Stalin by Hitler. Is it for the United Nations to confirm such a gift, as Stalin would like them to do now? Is Poland to fight against Germany in order to confirm a Nazi bargain? And on behalf of whom? Of the most territorially saturated country in the world, a country which represents the sixth part of the world, a country which among the Allies is the only one to advance territorial claims. All nations, great and small, fighting against the Axis, are fighting for a new, democratic organization of the world and for freedom based on justice and peace. They are fighting for an organization based on the principle of collective security, and not of imperialism. And there is no right given to a large nation, because it is large, to demand sacrifices of a small nation because it is small. Stalin may enter Poland and occupy it, but he will never obtain any voluntary acceptance of such a unilateral settlement. And such an act would hardly, I think, be a good beginning for world reorganization after the war.

We have come to the point at which I began: Polish-Russian relations should not be treated as an isolated case; they form only a part of the general problem of the post-war reconstruction of Europe. On what principles will this new order be built, and what spirit will guide it? Right and justice, or the might of the stronger? International agreement with sacrifices made by all countries, or spoliation of smaller countries in order to satisfy the supposed "national" interests of great powers? *Realpolitik* of the old-fashioned type, or a new world? The uneasiness which can be observed among the wide masses of the Polish emigration is due precisely to the fact that lately the ideological nature of the present international struggle has become confused and obscured. The best means, therefore, of remedying this situation would be to clarify and reaffirm the ideological stand of the democracies in this conflict.

The chief historical problem for both Russia and Poland is the problem of their mutual relations. It is not only their problem—it is a general European problem, a problem of world-wide significance for the future peace. Therefore, I consider the lack of diplomatic relations as a great European catastrophe. But what is the solution? Let me quote from an excellent study published in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, in London, in June 1943, under the title "Poland, Russia and Great Britain," and signed by the Editor:

"The crisis can be solved if England, like Russia—and the United States—has a foreign policy, and one that is so pursued and so expounded that there is no doubt at all as to what interests she regards as vital and where the interests lie. Politics, like nature, hate a vacuum and where British foreign policy does not exist, or where it is timorous, the policies of other Powers will prevail. To have a foreign policy, to pursue it with resolution, is the way not to new wars but to a lasting peace. To take the Polish-Russian crisis seriously, to uphold certain principles and ultimate vital interests, is not to engage in conflict with Russia, but to avert a future conflict. It is for Great Britain to do all that can be done by amicable but firm diplomacy (with the help of public opinion) to prevail upon Russia that she may abandon her anti-Polish policy, that she may desist from polemics conducted in a manner that is unworthy of a Great Power. . . Beyond this, it will be necessary to collaborate with Russia in organizing the security of eastern and south-eastern Europe, of the Straits and of the Eastern Mediterranean, and of the whole Near and Middle East. On collaboration with Russia the future peace of Europe chiefly depends—the alternative is the Third World War. It is impossible to abandon eastern and south-eastern Europe without abandoning all Europe. The fashionable thesis that Europe must be divided into spheres of influence is reactionary in the direct sense of the word . . . If England upholds her principles and resolutely meets every menace, however distant, to her vital interests, she will perpetuate her own security—and give security to Russia. On that basis collaboration with Russia is possible—and only on that basis. And on that basis the Polish-Russian conflict can be brought to an end."

The same might be said about the policy of United States.

I should like to add that at the present time no Great Power can afford to be great merely in material strength—it must be great also in its moral strength. As Mr. Churchill put it in his speech at Harvard: "The price of greatness is responsibility". In the soul of the whole Polish nation the course of Poland appears as indissolubly attached to something greater than Poland herself—to Europe, to something still greater than Europe—to the ideal of justice. That is what we Poles understand and at this moment consider axiomatic. This interpretation of history gives us faith and reinforces it at the same time. Despite and against all the unjust propaganda directed against us, we have a firm hope that the "just cause" cannot be betrayed. We believe that if it were to be so, a general disaster would be inevitable. It is not a wild and obstinate Polonocentricity which makes us think that way; it is a philosophy of history of wider character. "Just causes" are peculiar in that their defeats are always followed, sooner or later, by the divergence of the "unjust

causes" which collaborate and triumph in accord only for a very short time . . . And it is in this divergence that the Nemesis of history, the threat of vengeance, lies hidden. Poland is a principle, a part, a fragment of a system of principles for which this war is being waged—"That is the question".